



How Wiltshire Council is making citizen outcomes the cornerstone of its service provision.

Driven by the citizen

In the private sector, we're used to hearing the customer is king (or queen). Increasingly, however, people's experience as customers is now driving their expectations as citizens.

More than ever, they're demanding high quality services delivered when and where they want them, judging satisfaction by what they're seeing on the ground in their day-to-day lives.

Private sector expectations, public sector delivery

For Dr Carlton Brand, corporate director of Wiltshire Council, the challenge of satisfying citizens has become steadily more intense. Today's public tends to set the standard according to the highest levels of service they see in the private sector – the often quoted 'John Lewis effect' – and any organisation failing to meet these standards is now seen as letting citizens down. This has driven Brand to focus on ensuring Wiltshire's service delivery becomes every bit as good as the best of the private sector.

"The key thing for me is that customers are being exposed to companies like John Lewis, Marks & Spencer and Tesco, and expect similar levels of convenience and technology application in the public sector. We need to look at how these organisations work and see how this translates for us," Brand says.

Defining success, measuring service

This focus is so important that the council is using citizen outcomes as a key measure of success in its transformation programme. This programme aims to provide £36m in savings in the 2012-13 financial year while, at the same time, improving service delivery to the public.

Brand says there are basically two ways they measure success.

One comes from the conversations they have with citizens following the redesign of services. Importantly, even when it differs from central government targets, this provides an important measure of success. It enables them to determine the

best systems for service delivery and provides benchmarks so they can monitor performance.

The second way is to conduct large-scale surveys on citizen satisfaction, every six months. The results give the local authority a broader picture of how well they're perceived to be performing across a wide range of services.

"It involves measuring hard outcomes for specific services, but it has to be wrapped up in the reputation of the council and the reputation of the county," Brand says. "People's view of the council is heavily influenced by what they read in the local newspapers and see on TV, as well as the level of service they see."

No technology for technology's sake

As with many public sector organisations, increasing the use of technology is a central feature of the council's modernisation. However, Brand insists that technology is not driving the change. The council focuses first and foremost



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on citizen outcomes to decide how to change processes and only then asks what technology is fit for the purpose.

“We don’t chase the latest technology, but we do have a lot of the latest technology in use,” he says. “We’re going to the technology companies and describing the problem we have or what we are trying to achieve, then allowing them to show us what they can do.”

Enabling greater self-service

Investment has been made in other areas too. People can access a range of online services including: planning applications and consultations, library book reservations and renewals, reports and requests on refuse and recycling services, and payments for parking tickets and council tax.

Brand says the council isn’t preoccupied with maximising the number of contacts and transactions online, it depends on what works for each service. But he does highlight that the growth in take-up shows that it’s proving convenient for many citizens.

In addition, Wiltshire is increasing its use of mobile technology to support more community-based activity.

“Working from wherever the customer is,” is how Brand describes the change. This is particularly important for a rural authority. Outside towns, it can be difficult for staff to access and input data from people’s homes or community centres. As a result, it can be a challenge to speed up processes and make the council more efficient, not to mention improving public perception of its services.

Sharing resources across organisations

There have also been organisational changes aimed at improving citizen outcomes. Some employees are now working alongside NHS staff, local police and HM Revenue & Customs. They operate from the county’s public service hubs at Chippenham, Salisbury and Trowbridge, sharing data and IT systems. These teams provide front desks for the various services and share information to deliver more integrated services to the public.

This is a complex task of course, with important issues to be addressed around data security and privacy. Brand says this can provide big savings for the public sector, but suggests there is a need for the government to rethink its attitudes towards these issues.

“There’s a need for people like me, chief constables and chief executives in the health community to get on with sharing staff and facilities and, once you start doing this, you start uncovering how you share the IT bit,” he says.

“The flipside is that the government has to be a bit more relaxed about data and information sharing, using data once for everyone rather than everyone holding it multiple times. We’ve got to get more flexible.”

Collaborating for better service

Providing this flexibility could be a crucial step in supporting local authorities, as it is collaboration like this that will help to deliver improvements in citizen outcomes. As authorities such as Wiltshire Council work more closely with the health service, police and community groups, they will be better able to provide the type of services that the public now expects.

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About Dr Carlton Brand

Carlton has worked in local government for eight years and is Corporate Director at Wiltshire Council. This role contains the responsibilities usually held by a Chief Executive, including Returning Officer. Other responsibilities include business transformation, economic development, environment, planning, waste, highways, passenger transport, HR/OD, ICT, Property, and Business Services.

He has led on the transition to the new unitary council (Local Government Reorganisation – the merger of five councils into a single organisation); implementation of an ambitious new Business Management Programme (on the SAP ERP platform) to underpin the new organisation; the introduction of Systems Thinking (Lean) from manufacturing to transform service performance for customers and reduce cost; procurement reform; and a number of other efficiency and cost reduction programmes, amongst many other corporate responsibilities.

Prior to joining Wiltshire he was Corporate Director for Resources at St Edmundsbury Borough Council in Suffolk where he led on performance improvement through systems thinking and the efficiency/cost reduction agenda in response to the Gershon review as well as designing and implementing a new corporate procurement function.

For the first twenty years of his career, Carlton worked for Ford Motor Company; first as a design engineer in Product Development and latterly as a senior manager leading large teams of engineers on the concept, design, development and launch into manufacturing of major new model programmes such as the Focus and Fiesta. He has worked widely across Europe, the USA and Japan in many Ford and supplier engineering and manufacturing facilities in Programme and Project Management (PPM) roles.

Carlton acts as a coach to several external clients and a coach-mentor to a number of internal managers and staff. He was awarded his Advanced Certificate in Executive Coaching from Bristol Business School, and his Level 7 Certificate in Executive Coaching and Leadership Mentoring from the Institute of Leadership and Management. In line with best-practice, he works with a coaching supervisor.

Carlton holds Doctoral and Masters' degrees from the University of Hertfordshire (automotive engineering & management), and a bachelors' degree in Business Studies from the University of East London. He studied at Henley Management College on the Ford Fast Track Management Programme and at Duke University, North Carolina, USA on their Strategic Marketing Programme.

He was invited to submit a biography to Who's Who for the 2011 edition.

Married with two young sons he enjoys cricket, motor sport, fishing and astronomy.